

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR DON KNABE

June 19, 2007

As I have stated before, Los Angeles County needs to take a strong leadership role in addressing the serious issues impacting the Juvenile Justice system. There is a need now more than ever to introduce dramatic reforms and improvements to this system. While the Children's Planning Council reports on youth in the juvenile justice system indicate that the problems afflicting juvenile justice are inter-related, we can and must begin our reform efforts with meeting the educational needs of the almost 3,000 youth enrolled in Probation schools.

We have made small steps in the right direction. In 1997, I implemented the Operation Read program to address literacy needs of students at the lowest level, and I have led efforts to ensure that students leaving the system have a library card. But it is time to move towards comprehensive, systematic reforms to improve the overall prospects of Probation students.

Priority one should be improved education standards: increased literacy, improved test scores, and better overall academic achievement. In 2004, 74 percent of the students enrolled in Juvenile Court and Community Schools did not pass the California High School Exit Examination. Studies performed by the Education Coordinating Council (ECC) in 2006 indicated that Probation students have serious challenges in every major indicator of academic achievement. 20 percent of all Probation students require special education programs, which is double that of the general school special education population.

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While there is no doubt that this effort raises many complex and challenging questions, the indicators we are seeing and the results we are getting are unacceptable. It is time to shift our focus from pointing out these pervasive problems to solving them for the benefit of the children that come under our responsibility.

I, THEREFORE, MOVE that Board of Supervisors direct the Chief Probation Officer, in collaboration with the Los Angeles County Superintendent of Schools, the Los Angeles County Board of Education, the Probation Commission, the Los Angeles County Librarian, the Department of Mental Health, the Children's Planning Council and the Chief Executive Officer develop a comprehensive plan to dramatically reform education programs in the County's juvenile halls and probation camps, including an exploration of the feasibility of charter schools and other innovative models of education, and report back every 60 days as to the progress.

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